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ABSTRACT

Counseling students in order to help them make sound educational, career, and personal decisions requires an understanding of their values, priorities, and preconceptions about their options. The present study explored the attitudes of male and female college students regarding maternal employment, and their own career and family expectations, in order to assist those who counsel this population. Perceptions of the benefits and costs associated with maternal employment were assessed through administration of the Beliefs about the Consequences of Maternal Employment for Children questionnaire (BACMEC). Disparities between males' preferences for spousal employment and females' preferences for employment at different developmental stages of children's lives were examined. Results reveal that male participants' mothers' employment during their early childhood was significantly associated with their preferences regarding their future wives' employment during their children's infancy. Analyses of female employment preferences showed significant effects for preferences during the preschool, elementary school, and adolescent years. Women whose own mothers had worked while the participants were young were more likely to prefer working at these developmental stages of their own children. (Contains 42 references.) (GCP)

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HELPING STUDENTS PREPARE TO JUGGLE CAREER AND FAMILY: YOUNG ADULTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract

Counseling students in order to help them make sound educational, career, and personal decisions requires an understanding of their values, priorities, and preconceptions about their options. The present study explored the attitudes of male and female college students regarding maternal employment, and their own career and family expectations, in order to assist those who counsel this population. Perceptions of the benefits and costs associated with maternal employment were assessed through administration of the BACMEC. Disparities between males' preferences for spousal employment and females' preferences for employment at different developmental stages of children's lives were examined.

Subjects were divided into two groups on the basis of maternal work status (nonemployed versus employed) during their early childhood (birth to 5 years). Subjects were similarly grouped on the basis of maternal employment during their later childhood (elementary school years and adolescence). Scores on the two BACMEC subscales were calculated for each subject. Between groups t-tests revealed a significant sex effect on both the benefits and costs subscales; males perceived fewer benefits and greater costs than females. When males and females were assessed jointly, early maternal employment was significantly associated with perceptions of both the benefits and costs associated with maternal employment.

Separate chi square analyses were conducted for male and female subjects assessing the relationship between maternal employment history and future employment preferences. Male participants' mothers' employment during their early childhood was significantly associated with their preferences regarding their future wives' employment during their children's infancy. Chi square analyses of female employment preferences

showed significant effects for preferences during the preschool, elementary school, and adolescent years. Women whose own mothers had worked while the participants were young were more likely to prefer working at these developmental stages of their own children. Analysis also revealed a significant effect for later maternal employment, but only for participants' employment preferences during their children's elementary school years. Women whose own mothers worked during their school years were more likely to prefer working once their children reached elementary school age.

Introduction

Counseling students in order to help them make sound educational, career, and personal decisions requires an understanding of their values, priorities, and preconceptions about their options. The present study explored the attitudes of male and female college students regarding maternal employment, and their own career and family expectations, in order to assist those who counsel this population. Since most of today's young adults will become part of two-paycheck families, both male and female students today typically anticipate eventually having to juggle career and family roles. In helping students plan for their futures, it is valuable to understand how young adults perceive maternal employment and its impact on families. It is also helpful to appreciate differences between men's and women's attitudes and expectations, because unaddressed incongruence can create family conflicts down the line. Understanding common discrepancies between the ways men and women perceive the impact of maternal employment, and typical clashes between the work expectations of men and women, can improve the counseling process.

Research has examined the differences between men and women from many different angles. While some schools of thought emphasize physical differences, others focus on socialization disparities. The socialization of children in any society provides the framework for future adult actions and attitudes. According to Mooney Marini (1990), men and women differ in their thinking and expectations because their values and perceptions of norms are shaped by different life experiences

In recent years, the U.S. has witnessed family lifestyle shifts that are affecting the way children are raised, what is considered normal, and what makes men and women different. While conventional gender socialization teaches women to be obedient and submissive, modern education teaches both women and men to be autonomous and independent (Xiao, 2000).

Historically, gender determined much of an individual's life experience. Gender inequality gave men access to greater social power and prestige than women. In the U.S., as women are becoming more independent through education, career advancements, and lower birthrates, gender inequalities are decreasing (Baxter & Kane, 1995). "Women's growing earning power and commitment to the paid workforce together with the stagnation of men's social mobility have resulted in the erosion of male dominance" (Gerson 1993). Not long ago, men who were psychologically unsatisfied with their lower income jobs generally remained employed because it 'validated' their role as a man, a provider, and a breadwinner. Today, many of these men still are most resistant to notions of gender equality. Some seem to fear a working wife because she may threaten a husband's sole breadwinner status. Better educated men, and men with higher salaries,

often hold different attitudes, seeing their wives' employment as a welcome means of reducing the pressure associated with a family's relying on just one wage earner (Zuo, 2000).

Employed women are more likely than nonemployed women to endorse egalitarian gender ideologies (Zuo, 2000) when it comes to the roles and responsibilities of men and women.When compared to men, women with a feminist or egalitarian gender ideology give the same or even greater importance to their careers (Peplau, Hill & Rubin, 1993). In 1971, Greenhaus reported that the importance of one's career, in relation to his/her life, was most related to the prestige of the job or the ambition of the individual. However, we are coming to learn that women define the prestige of their careers through their own personal attitudes and behaviors, rather than through a preconceived idea of "prestigious" or "successful". Women's experience in the workplace seems to be significantly shaped by the support they receive from family and friends (Farmer 1985).

Attitudes, experiences, environmental supports, upbringing and even religion all play a part in determining the kinds of careers women choose. Higher education and advanced degrees make it more likely for women to become part of the labor force and increases their professional expectations (Barsow, 1992). More years of formal education not only make women less likely to be conforming, but also prepare them for professional jobs (Xiao, 2000). One study found that women raised in traditional households are just as likely to consider their careers to be as important as their family roles (Davey & Stoppard, 1993), underscoring the importance of non-family environmental factors and/or education. Since women's career choices are affected by the men in their lives, husbands and wives who enter into marriage with different gender ideologies may be disappointed to find that their expectations of one another fail to be understood or met.

Recent Census Bureau statistics indicate that the two-paycheck family is now the norm, even among families with young children (including those under one year of age). There have been relatively few empirical studies of adult children's perceptions of the impact of their mother's employment status. Although much is known about the short term consequences of maternal employment (based on studies of young children), there are few investigations using adult subjects. The present research explores the effects of maternal work status on the career and family plans of male and female college students.

Many have suggested that much of the struggle found in current two-paycheck family parents will disappear when members of the next generation become parents, because so many themselves were reared in this "nontraditional" type of family. According to this argument, it is the incongruity of having been a child in a "traditional" family (where the father is the sole employed adult) while living out one's adult life in a "nontraditional" family (where both parents are employed) that fueled the pandemic conflict, guilt, and anxiety that beset two-paycheck families of the '80s and '90s.

Having childhood experiences with an employed mother could certainly affect one's perceptions about the appropriateness of maternal employment and affect one's own lifestyle choices and adjustment. Perhaps having an employed mother will equip future husbands with an outlook that will enable them to cope more effectively with the demands of being a father in a two-paycheck household.

Studies have found that, although there is no direct correlation between maternal work status and the father's satisfaction with the quality of his marriage, maternal

employment may be problematic for fathers with traditional sex role ideologies (Kessler and McRae, 1982). In addition to husband's sex-role attitudes, negative effects on the father are also mediated by social class and the extent to which the father in the dual-earner family participates in child care. It has been suggested that, especially in the blue-collar class, negative correlations between maternal employment and the father's morale are the result of the prevalent belief that fathers derive their sense of self-esteem from their role of sole breadwinner (Kessler and McRae, 1982). Thus, a man with this traditional belief would feel threatened by an employed wife who shares the role of breadwinner. This perceived blow to the father's self-esteem could be at the root of family conflicts, which would lead him to report negative feelings about his dual-earner marriage, which might affect the developing attitudes of sons and daughters in the family.

The experience of being reared by an employed mother may have an even greater impact on daughters. Daughters of employed mothers have been shown to be more egalitarian in their sex role attitudes (Knoblach and Chambliss, 1989; Brogan and Kutner, 1976; Meier, 1972; Gardner and LeBreque, 1986). Daughters of employed women tend to be more career oriented, more ambitious (Almquist and Angrist, 1971) and more often tend to plan to go to college (Hoffman, 1974). In a summary of the literature, Hoffman notes that the most egalitarian ideologies held by women of employed mothers were those whose mothers held high status jobs (Hoffman, 1974).

Crouter, et al. (1987) suggested that dual-earner marital conflicts occur most for married, employed parents whose dual-earner lifestyles do not match their own preferences and expectations for married life (Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston and McHale, 1987). Other investigators have also agreed that an important variable in mediating marital conflicts is a match between husbands' preferences regarding whether or not they work outside the home (Kessler and McRae, 1982). These preferences are almost certainly shaped in part by beliefs about the consequences of maternal employment on children.

In a study regarding children's perceptions of their parents, Knaub (1986) surveyed adolescent and young adult children of dual-career families about their satisfaction with this lifestyle, perceptions of family strength, and views on various issues related to the dual-career lifestyle. In general, children rated their families as being relatively high on perceptions of family strengths such as concern, respect, and support. The subjects mentioned having positive role models, financial security, and the opportunity to develop independence as possible benefits of growing up in a dual-career family. The subjects also indicated that time constraints were the primary problems they had with both of their parents working. However, these children were highly supportive of their parents' dual-career lifestyle, and they indicated that they thought the benefits of maternal employment outweighed the disadvantages.

A study of college student attitudes by Chambliss, Owens, and Carr (1991) provided no support for "working mother" guilt and anxiety. When compared with students from families with nonemployed mothers, students from two-paycheck families did not report greater family discord. They also showed no greater tendency to blame their mothers for childhood or current problems (social, esteem, intellectual, or academic). Students reported admiring mothers who worked fulltime most, mothers who worked parttime next, and nonemployed mothers least.

The only consistently perceived "casualties" of maternal employment were perceptions of the mother's happiness and quality of her marriage. Many students whose mothers were employed fulltime during the subjects' infancy or preschool years reported the belief that their mothers "would have been happier" and their marriages "would have been better" had their mothers' work status been different. However, it is important to note that even here, the majority of students with fulltime employed mothers did not perceive maternal work status as having compromised either mothers' happiness or marriage quality.

The present study was performed in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between maternal employment and college students' attitudes toward maternal employment and their own plans for future workplace involvement. The congruence between males' and females' attitudes and their plans to pursue traditional versus two-paycheck lifestyles after having children will be explored.

Method

The subjects whose data was analyzed in this study were 584 college students who were reared in families with two parents. The sample consisted of 209 men and 375 women who were enrolled in an introductory psychology course; the subjects ranged in age from 18 to 28 years old.

The packet used in this study was handed out to subjects in the introductory psychology class in which they were enrolled. Subjects were asked to fill out the packet in its entirety. Ample time was given to the students to complete the questionnaire packet. The packet used in this study consisted of four different parts.

In part one, subjects were asked to provide demographic information and to answer questions concerning their career and family expectations. These questions required subjects to disclose information concerning their expectations about family plans, job type, job characteristics, and work preference based on the age of their youngest child. Subjects were also asked 10 questions concerning their attitudes toward their mother and father. These questions required subjects to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement on a 4 point Likert scale.

Part two of the packet was made up of the BACMEC questionnaire (Greenberger et al. 1988). The BACMEC is a 24-item scale developed to measure Beliefs About the Consequences of Maternal Employment for Children. The BACMEC included beliefs about both benefits (13 items) and costs (11 items). Studies of five samples (n=375) have demonstrated that the total BACMEC scale and its subscales are highly reliable and have good convergent, divergent, and concurrent validity (Greenberger et al. 1988).

In part three of the packet, subjects were asked to disclose information about their mother's work status at each stage of development. The stages of development were infancy (birth to 1 1/2 years old), preschool (2 to 5 years old), childhood (6 to 12 years old), and adolescence (13 to 18 years old). The subjects were asked to report whether their mothers were employed parttime, fulltime, or not employed outside the home during each stage of development. Subjects also disclosed information about their mother's job, indicating whether it was professional, white collar, or blue collar work. Subjects were also asked to indicate whether or not they had been raised in a single parent household.

Part four of the packet consisted of the CAS, the Childhood Appraisal Scale (Chambliss, Owens, & Carr 1991). The CAS is an 18-item questionnaire designed to measure the subject's perception of the consequences of their mother's work status. The subjects were asked to rate each item on a scale from 1 to 4 depending on how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The statements permitted subjects to indicate if they felt their lives would have been different if their mother's work status had been different when they were growing up. This allowed an assessment of the perceived impact of fulltime and parttime maternal employment, as well as unemployment.

Results

Subjects were divided into two groups (early nonemployed versus early employed) on the basis of maternal work status during their early childhood (birth to 5 years old). Maternal employment included both fulltime and parttime employment Subjects were similarly grouped on the basis of maternal employment (late nonemployment versus late employment) during their later childhood (6 through 18 years old). Maternal employment included both fulltime and parttime employment . Subjects from single parent households were excluded from the analyses described below.

Scores on the two BACMEC subscales ("benefits" and "costs" of maternal employment) were calculated for each subject by adding the directionally adjusted item values. Between groups t-tests revealed a significant sex effect on both the benefits ($t=3.36$, $df=567$, $p<.001$) and costs ($t=2.64$, $df=567$, $p<.01$) subscales; males perceived fewer benefits and greater costs than females (see Table 1). When males and females were assessed jointly, early maternal employment was significantly associated with perceptions of both the benefits ($t=5.18$, $df=447$, $p<.001$) and costs ($t=5.81$, $df=447$, $p<.001$) associated with maternal employment; those whose mothers worked perceived greater benefits and fewer costs than those whose own mothers had not worked during their early childhood (see table 2).

When males' expectations of their spouses' employment was compared with females' working preferences at different ages of children, some interesting incongruencies were noted. While during children's infancy males' preferences were generally consistent with females' employment preferences (90% of the males preferred their wives not work and 8% of the females preferred not to work), once children reach the preschool years, a disparity was found between males' preferences (72% don't want wives working at this point in their children's lives) and female preferences (only 54% don't want to work during their children's preschool years). During children's elementary school years, a third (37%) of the males don't want their wives working, while only 12% of the females prefer this. Once children reach adolescence, 17% of the males still don't want their wives working, while only 7% of the females prefer not working at this point.

Separate chi square analyses were conducted for male and female subjects to assess the relationship between maternal employment history and future employment preferences. Male participants' mothers' employment during their early childhood (early employment versus nonemployment) was significantly associated with their preferences regarding their future wives' employment during their children's infancy (chi square=13.01(1), $p<.001$). While 45% of th men whose mothers had worked during their early childhood preferred for their own wives to work during their children's infancy,

only 17% of those whose mothers had not worked wanted their own wives to work during this period. No significant maternal employment effects were found on preferences for wives' working during children's preschool and elementary school years, however preferences during children's adolescence were significantly different depending on mothers' early employment (chi square=4.93(1), p<.05). Men whose own mothers had worked early on were less likely to prefer spousal employment during children's adolescence (74% versus 88%).

Chi square analyses of female employment preferences revealed no significant effect of early maternal employment on preferences to work during children's infancy, but did show significant effects for preferences during the preschool (chi square=24.10(1), p<.001), elementary school (chi square=5.52(1), p<.05), and adolescent (chi square=5.92(1), p<.05) years. Women whose own mothers had worked while the participants were young were more likely to prefer working at these developmental stages of their own children (preschool: 62% versus 31%); elementary school: 92% versus 82%; adolescence:98% versus 89%). Only the minority of both women whose own mothers worked during their early childhood years and those whose mothers did not work expressed a preference to work during their own children's infancy (19% versus 13%, ns).

Chi square analyses of the relationship between later maternal employment and males' spousal employment preferences revealed no significant effects. Chi square analyses of females working preferences revealed a significant effect for later maternal employment only for participants' employment preferences during their children's elementary school years (ch square=5.30(1), p<.05). Women whose own mothers worked during their school years (ages 6-18 years) were more likely to prefer working once their children reached elementary school age (92% versus 80%).

Discussion

Males and females expressed very different views regarding maternal employment. Specifically, college men seem to feel that there are more costs and fewer benefits associated with maternal employment than do college women. These inconsistencies between men and women are further exemplified by the men's expectations of their spouse's employment as compared to the women's plans about their own future employment. Initially, men and women tend to agree that mothers should stay home with their infants. Most of the men expect their wives to do this, and many women report that they do not plan to work at that stage of their children's lives. However, for the rest of the child's life, there are gaps between the percentage of men who expect their wives to work and the percentage of women who expect to be working. Many more men expect that their wives will be staying at home to raise children, while women believe that they will employed outside the home. It is important to note that both men and women find it more acceptable for mothers to be employed as their children get older. The older the children, the smaller the percentages of both men and women who prefer the mother to stay at home.

For both male and female college students, there are differences in attitudes towards maternal employment based on whether or not their own mothers were employed during their early childhood. When assessed together, men and women felt that there

were fewer costs and more benefits if their mothers had been employed during early childhood. There were additional differences between subjects whose mothers worked and subjects whose mothers did not when males and females were looked at separately.

Men whose mothers worked outside the home during their early childhood were more likely to prefer that their wives work during their children's infancy than those whose own mothers did not work while they were very young. The sons of employed mothers were more receptive to maternal employment than men whose mothers had not worked outside the home. This may be due to the fact that they had a positive experience with maternal employment and positive personal outcomes. There is no difference between men whose mothers worked and those whose did not in their preference for spousal employment during the preschool and elementary school years. However, there is a surprising shift in attitude during adolescence. Men whose mothers did not work during early childhood were more likely to prefer that their spouse work during adolescence than men whose mothers did work. Perhaps men whose mothers worked during early childhood continued to work for their entire childhood and could not be there for support during adolescence. These men may have had a difficult adolescence for this or other reasons, and perhaps are blaming this difficulty on their mothers' employment during this stage of their life. Despite this contradictory finding, more men from both groups prefer that their wives work as the children get older.

There are also differences between women whose mothers worked during early childhood and those subjects whose mothers did not. Women whose mothers were employed during their early childhood were more likely to prefer to work during their children's preschool, elementary, and adolescent years. As was true for the men, the gaps between the two groups of women got smaller as children got older and more women from both groups preferred to work outside the home by the time their children were adolescents. An interesting finding was that there was not a difference between the two groups of women about their preference to work during their children's infancy. Only a very small percentage of women from either group reported that would seek outside employment during their children's infancy. Although the women whose mothers worked during early childhood learned from this example and plan to work at some point during their own children's lives, women still hesitate to work during a child's infancy.

There were several common findings among all of the college students. Both men and women tend to believe that mothers should stay at home during children's infancy. Many people still believe that important bonding is achieved during this stage of life and that mothers best foster this attachment by staying at home with their young children. However, as children enter school, men and women feel more comfortable with maternal employment. This could be due to the fact that the children are no longer at home during the day so mothers who work are not missing out on time spent with their children. By the time children reach adolescence, most men and women feel it is appropriate for mothers to work outside the home. Again, this may be due to the fact that mothers do not miss time with adolescents by working. Adolescents spend a majority of time at school, in extracurricular activities, and with peers. Even if mothers were at home, many adolescents would not be comfortable spending time with them. Mothers who work also seem to set a good example for both sons and daughters, who later are more accepting of maternal employment.

Future research should separate men and women further based on whether their mothers did not work, worked part-time, or worked full-time. There may be further differences between these groups. Those subjects whose mothers worked part-time may have distinctive attitudes. On the one hand, it is possible that mothers who work part-time provide a positive role model of an employed adult, without undo stress or as much risk of sacrificing the needs of their families. This may produce the most positive attitudes toward maternal employment among children. Alternatively, it may be that mothers who work part-time do so because they are more ambivalent about working, and consequently may be more likely to communicate their negative feelings about maternal employment to their children. This might yield greater concerns about the impact of maternal employment among the offspring of mothers who worked part-time.

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